



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MJFSVH CAMPUS BECOMES PURPLE HEART CAMPUS

On August 24, the Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota State Veterans Home became a "Purple Heart" campus.

The mission of the Military Order of the Purple Heart is to foster an environment of goodwill among the combat-wounded veteran members and their families, promote patriotism, support legislative initiatives, and most importantly, to make sure we honor and never forget. This mission aligns with the mission and vision of the State Veterans Home.

Ken Teunissen, commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the Dakota's presented Superintendent Brad Richardson with the signs for the campus.

The State Veterans Home appreciates the sacrifices our Purple Heart recipients made in defending our freedoms and believe it is important that we acknowledge them for their courage and show them the honor and support they have earned.



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BENNETT NAMED CTVSO OF THE YEAR

Craig Bennett of Mitchell has been named the 2019 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs "County/Tribal Veterans Service Officer of the Year." Bennett was recognized by his peers at SDDVA's annual benefit conference Monday, Aug. 26, in Pierre.

Craig Bennett, veterans service officer for Davison County, was awarded the 2019 County and Tribal Veterans Service Officer of the Year award for his knowledge of federal and state regulations governing veteran's benefits, as well as quality of the claims his office files.

Key achievements of the CTVSO of the Year were: customer service, submission of complete and accurate claims, outstanding office management, and utilizing new and innovative procedures and technologies.

"Craig has an unwavering loyalty to his veterans and repeatedly demonstrates that he will go above and beyond what is required, or even expected, to see that they receive every benefit possible," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "He makes it a point of pride to pursue each claim or request as if he were doing it for his own benefit."



CARPENTER NAMED 2019 PARTNER OF THE YEAR

Sheila Carpenter of Pierre has been named the 2019 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Partner of the Year. Carpenter was recognized by her peers at SDDVA's annual benefit conference Monday, Aug. 26, in Pierre.

Sheila Carpenter, veterans service claims assistant for Hughes, Stanley, and Sully Counties, was awarded the 2019 Partner of the Year award for her compassion, commitment, knowledge and professionalism when assisting South Dakota's veterans.

Key achievements of the Partner of the Year were: best overall service provided by support staff of a county or tribal veteran service officer, outstanding customer service in assisting veterans and their families, great office management, and utilizing new technologies that benefit our network.

"Sheila Carpenter is excellent in her role as claims assistant," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "She keeps the office organized, visits with veterans and families, files claims, and conducts outreach."

Carpenter's office serves over 1,500 veterans in Hughes, Stanley and Sully counties.



LEASURE NAMED 2019 SDDVA EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Joe Leasure of Sioux Falls has been named the 2019 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Employee of the Year. Leasure was recognized by his peers at SDDVA's annual benefit conference Monday, Aug. 26, in Pierre.

Joe serves as a state veterans service officer for the Department. Joe has been with the Department for over three years.

Key achievements of the Employee of the Year were: exceeding expectations regarding veteran's issues, commitment to, and enthusiasm for the Department's mission statement, job knowledge, outstanding outreach efforts, involvement and active participation with service organizations, and growing relationship with T/CVSOs.

"Joe is the 'go to guy' in the office," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "His expertise, knowledge and drive assist our county and tribal veterans service officers and our staff. He has a great understanding of the federal rules and regulations guiding veterans' benefits."



IRONS RECEIVES 2019 SDDVA OUTREACH AWARD

Susan Irons of Canton has been named the 2019 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Outreach Partner of the Year. Irons was recognized by her peers at SDDVA's annual benefit conference Monday, Aug. 26, in Pierre.

Susan Irons, veterans service officer for Lincoln and Union Counties, was awarded the 2019 Outreach Partner of the Year award for going above and beyond in her efforts to reach out to South Dakota's Veterans.

Key achievements for outreach were: ensure that veterans are aware of their benefits, conduct informational meetings, involved in community activities and events, maintain good media relations, and excel in obtaining medals for veterans.

"Susan is an extremely active and visible VSO in her community," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "She is well regarded as a keynote speaker and in high demand to attend holiday ceremonies and veterans service organization events. She organizes and attends numerous local events in an effort to reach as many veterans as possible and make them aware that she is available to assist them."



Irons' office serves over 3,100 veterans in Lincoln County and over 1,100 in Union County.

SDDVA BENEFIT SCHOOL

This week, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs held our annual County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers training conference in Pierre.

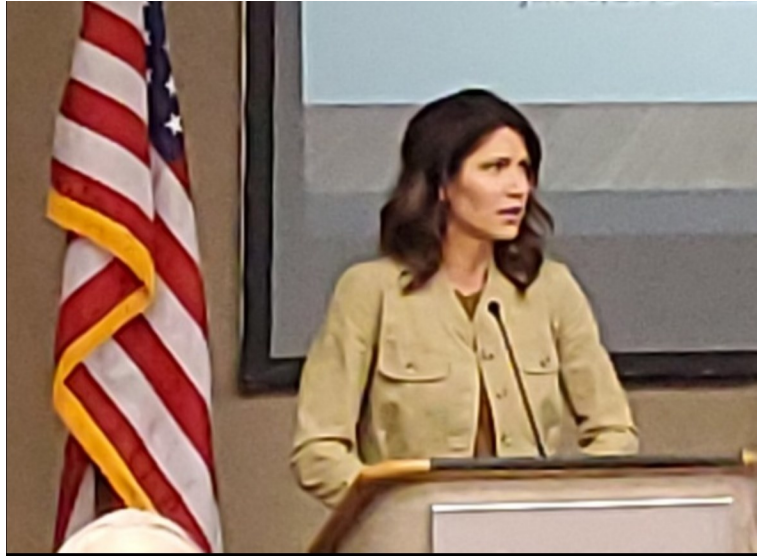
"Our County and Tribal Veterans Services Officers serve as counselors, ministers, lawyers, fellow veterans and much more," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "Veterans' needs vary from mental to physical health needs. This conference provides our CTVSOs with current and up-to-date tools to perform their jobs.

Sen. Mike Rounds, Representative Dusty Johnson and Governor Kristi Noem briefed the CTVSO's and the SDDVA staff and listened to the challenges our team faces in working with the federal programs.

Topics for the conference included: pension, life of a claim, ethics, prosthetics, Champ VA, education benefits, bilateral factors, appeals, working claims, and how to deal with difficult people. Updates were also provided by the Sioux Falls VA Regional Office, the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System and the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

SDDVA's next training opportunity for the county and tribal veterans service offices will be the winter

mini conference and will be conducted via skype.



CTVSO'S DONATE TO STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FOUNDATION

During the annual CTVSO Conference this week in Pierre, the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a vendor night.

This year's vendor night had 35 vendors participating. Vendors included those partners that offer services and programs that enhance the lives of our veterans. In conjunction with the vendor night, the Department hosted a poker run in an effort to get all participants to visit all of the booths and raise money for the state cemetery foundation. The winner has the opportunity to win half of funds received and donate half to the foundation.

Mike Bekaert, Director of in-state Military and Veterans Affairs for Senator Mike Rounds, was the winner of the poker run. But the big winner was the South Dakota State Veterans Cemetery Foundation as Mike opted to donate all of the funds to the foundation fun. Shelly Jund from the South Dakota Community Foundation was on hand to receive the \$640 that was donated to the Cemetery Foundation.



CVSO ASSOCIATION ELECTS

During the SDDVA Benefits Conference this week, members of the County Veterans Service Officers Association elected officers.

Elected to officer posts are as follows:

- President—Doug Huntrods (Meade County)
- Vice President—Aaron Walberg (Brown County)
- Secretary/Treasurer—Fred Kuil (Douglas County)
- Judge Advocate—Dennis Evenson (Deuel County)
- District 1 Representative—Courtney VanZanten (Lake County)
- District 2 Representative—Ron Hoffer (Edmunds County)
- District 3—Michael McDonald (Yankton County)
- District 4—Jesse Ketzer (Lawrence County)
- District 5—Geri Opsal (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate)



MJFSVH 130TH CELEBRATION

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice South Dakota State Veterans Home in Hot Springs will host its 130th Anniversary celebration on Friday, September 20, 2019.

The celebration kicks off with a community parade at 9:30 am (MT). The parade, coordinated by American Legion Post 71, will start at Centennial Park in downtown Hot Springs and travel up North River Street and on to Minnekahta Avenue, with the procession arriving at MJFSVH around 10:30 am (MT). Parade entry forms can be obtained at Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce office in the Mueller Civic Center.

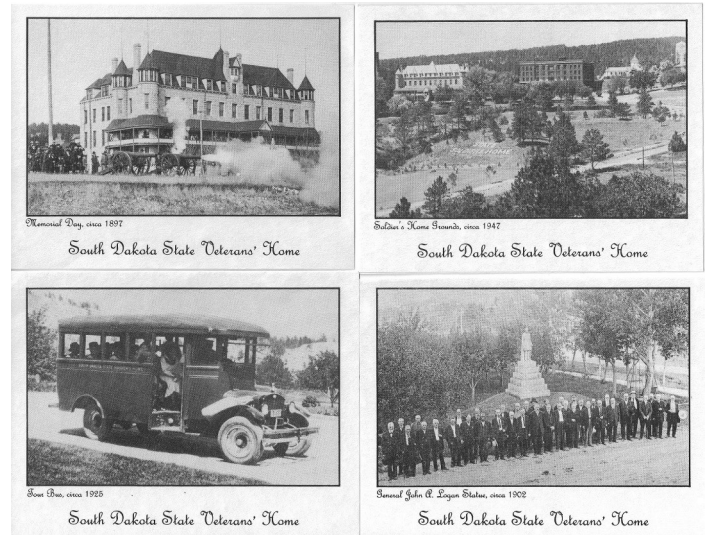
The anniversary celebration will continue with presentations at 11:00 am at the front entry at the Home (2500 Minnekahta Avenue).

Immediately following, VFW Post 3442 will provide a free-will lunch with entertainment provided. Tours of the campus will be provided starting at 1:00 pm

"Our entire campus, along with our community partners, are excited to host this celebration," said Superintendent Brad Richardson. "This 130th anniversary is truly a celebration of every South Dakota family who has supported our US military over the past decades. It underscores South Dakota's rich legacy and commitment, over the past 130 years, to take care of our heroes and our allegiance to carry that mission into the next century."

Originally intended to serve as a home for disabled veterans of the Civil War, Hot Springs was selected as the location for the Home by the Dakota Territory legislature. Thanks to lobbying by members of the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization of Civil War-era veterans, whose leaders found the naturally warm mineral springs and mild weather of the Hot Springs area to be conducive to health.

The Home's original construction began with the placing of the cornerstone on November 5, 1889, and the Home opened a year later with its first resident registering on November 25, 1890. The Home's historic original building, known informally as "Building Two," was made from locally quarried sandstone and is still utilized on campus.



The current Home opened in 2016, and is a 133,000-square-foot, two story facility with living spaces broken into eight neighborhoods that provide a home-like environment to the residents.

Since 1889, the staff and volunteers have carried out the mission "to honor and serve our South Dakota military veterans, their spouses, widows, or widowers, now and for generations to come."

VETERANS LEGACY MEMORIAL

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA) launched the [Veterans Legacy Memorial](#) (VLM), Aug. 14, the country's first digital platform dedicated entirely to the preservation of the memory of the 3.7 million veterans interred in VA national cemeteries.

Each veteran will have their own memorial page on the VLM, a secure, web-based platform that creates a perpetual memorial extending beyond the physical border of the national cemetery.

"Veterans Legacy Memorial ensures "no veteran ever dies" by honoring the legacy of our nation's veterans, not just in our cemeteries, but in a new and innovative digital setting," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It enhances the onsite national cemetery experience and extends the experience to those who otherwise are unable to physically visit the cemetery."

NCA, in conjunction with [VA's Office of Information and Technology](#), built the architecture for the site starting with the information contained on every Veteran's headstone.

In the initial rollout, the public will be able to search the site for veterans, find out where they are buried and read the basic details of their lives and service. Future capabilities may be expanded to allow families, survivors, fellow veterans and others to add historic photos and share memories to a deceased Veteran's memorial page. Such capabilities will include provisions that allows NCA to manage the site in a manner that maintains the same level of decorum our customers experience in our national cemeteries.

For more information about the Veterans Legacy Memorial, visit <https://www.va.gov/remember>, or contact Dr. Bryce Carpenter, Veterans Legacy Program Manager, at bryce.carpenter@va.gov. Have questions about Veterans Legacy Memorial? Find what you're looking for at [VLM FAQ](#).



NEW VA CLINIC COMING TO ABERDEEN

The Sioux Falls Veterans Affairs Health Care System invites veterans and their families, veterans' advocates and community residents to the groundbreaking for the new VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Aberdeen, Sept. 3.

The ceremony will be held at 909 S. Lamont Street and will begin at noon.

The clinic will include a 9,908 square foot building which will provide primary care, mental health, home based primary care and telehealth services.

The clinic will serve the following seven counties: Brown, Edmunds, Marshall, McPherson, Fault Spink and Dickey and is expected to be complete by Spring 2020.

Construction Managers Incorporated is the general contractor.

VA PARTNERS WITH NGB

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense formalized a partnership June 28 between VA's Vet Centers and the National Guard Bureau, to provide Vet Center counseling, outreach staff and other services to members during training or drill weekends.

"This relationship between VA and the National Guard further advances the department's efforts to decrease service member and veteran suicide," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Vet Center staff will provide counseling and referral to those who may be under stress and at risk for self-harm."

VA's 300 Vet Centers, 80 Mobile Vet Centers and a 24/7 call center provide community-based counseling for a wide range of social and psychological services, including confidential readjustment counseling and outreach and referral to eligible veterans, active-duty, and National Guard and Reserve members and their families.

Vet Center counselors and outreach staff, many of whom are veterans themselves, are experienced and prepared to discuss the tragedies of war, loss, grief and transition after trauma.

Suicide prevention is a top priority for the National Guard, which experienced the highest rate of suicide among military components in 2017. Since then, the VA has seen a 38% increase in National Guard service members seeking Vet Center services.*

"This is an important and historic day for the National Guard and Veterans Affairs," said Gen. Joseph L. Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, "This partnership will increase our ability to offer access to services to our Guard Soldiers and Airmen and their families who live in remote locations. Ultimately, this partnership will positively impact the readiness of our force."

Suicides across the Guard have dropped to the lowest point than they have been in the past five years when comparing annual data from January to August. The NGB is carefully examining the information to determine whether a direct correlation exists between the reduction of suicides so far in 2019, and this type of strategic engagement.

Nearly 300,000 veterans and active-duty service members received Vet Center services in 2018.

To find out more about Vet Centers, or to locate a nearby Vet Center, visit www.vetcenter.va.gov.

**Data was pulled from October 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018 and compared with data from October 1, 2018 to July 31, 2019.*



SOCIAL SECURITY UPDATE



Social Security

On April 13, 2018, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2018 was signed into law. One of the provisions of the law, Section 201, allows beneficiaries to designate an individual(s) to serve as payee should the need arise, and requires SSA to select the designated individual with certain exemptions. It also requires Social Security to annually notify beneficiaries that have chosen to Advance Designate, under Section 201, of the information provided on their advance designees.

On August 13, 2019, SSA published in the *Federal Register* a Paperwork Reduction Act Notice for the proposed Advance Designation of Representative Payee Internet screens and forms. The notice is available [here](#). To request copies of the draft screens and forms, please contact OR.Reports.Clearance@ssa.gov. If you wish to submit comments on the drafts, you may submit them to the same email address or to [regulations.gov](#). You have until October 15, 2019 to submit comments.

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION UPDATE: GULF WAR VETERANS



A VA study of Gulf War-era Veterans showed that many health problems, including migraine headaches, dermatitis, and arthritis, were more common among females compared to males. The exception was for certain diseases related to cardiovascular health and diabetes, which are generally more common among U.S. males. The findings are illustrated at <https://go.usa.gov/xVTWJ>

VETERANS PRESENTED THE FRENCH LEGION OF HONOR

Community leaders and veterans gathered in the communities of Spearfish, Faulkton and Mitchell last Thursday and Friday as three World War II Veterans received the French Legion of Honor.

Counsel General of France to the Midwest Region Guillaume LaCroix officially presented to the French Legion of Honor to Kenneth Higashi (Spearfish), Jimmy Traupel (Mitchell), and Orville LeBrew (Faulkton)

Lt. Governor Larry Rhoden, SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock, SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard and Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Marlette participated in the ceremonies.

Special thanks to Fred Nelson, July Grabinski, David Huss, Craig Bennett and Jesse Ketzer for assisting the French Consulate in coordinating these events.



LaCroix presenting medal to Traupel



Lt. Governor Rhoden thanking Higashi for his service..



LaCroix presenting medal to LeBrew.



SDDVA Secretary Whitlock thanking LeBrew for his service.

Groundbreaking Ceremony for
South Dakota State Veterans Cemetery
Monday, September 9, at 9:00 am (CT)



Directions —

If traveling on I-229 North: Take I-229 North until it ends and turns into Jim Zweep Highway. Approximately a quarter mile north turn right onto Slip Up Creek Road. Follow Slip Up Creek Road until you see the entrance to the cemetery land.

If you're traveling on I-90: Whether traveling East or West on I-90 take the Cliff Avenue Exit (Exit 399) and head North. Travel North approximately three miles to 258th Street. Turn Right heading East on 258th St. Approximately two miles East turn right on to 477th Ave heading South. Travel South approximately one-and-a-half miles and the cemetery property will be on your right.

Good tip for the event — please remind anyone attending to pack their lawn chairs for the groundbreaking. A limited amount of chairs will be available for the speakers and for those with mobility issues.



Aug 31—15th Annual 727th Transportation/DAV Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings
 Sep 1—Activation Ceremony for the 1-147th Field Artillery Unit—Aberdeen Central High School Gymnasium (2200 S. Roosevelt Street) - 2:00 pm (CT)
 Sep 3—High Five Tour Ford 150 Raptor—Sioux Falls Ford (4901 W. 26th Street)—8:00—10:00 am (CT)
 Sep 3—Aberdeen CBOC Groundbreaking—909 S. Lamont Street—Aberdeen—Noon (CT)
 Sep 9—SD State Veterans Cemetery Groundbreaking—9:00 am (CT)
 Sep 12—SD Veterans Commission Conf. Call Meeting—4:00 pm (CT)
 Sep 14—SDSU 2nd Annual Veterans Affairs Golf Tournament—Edgebrook Golf Course—Brookings—8:00 am (CT)
 Sep 21—SFVAHCS Whole Health Class—Sioux Falls Vet Center (3200 W. 49th Street)—9:00 am—11:00 am (CT)
 Sep 21—Davison County Veterans Wellness and Benefit Fair—Mitchell Corn Palace—8:00 am—4:30 pm (CT)
 Sep 21—EAFB Health and Wellness Expo—
 Sep 21-22—SD American Legion Golf Tournament—Hartford Golf Course
 Sep 24—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 5 Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—8:45 pm (CT)—doors open at 7:15
 Nov 2—Second Annual Hangar Dance (Midwest Honor Flight Benefit)—Mid America Museum of Aviation—Sioux City, IA—7:00 pm (CT)
 Dec 3—Governor Noem's Budget Address
 Jan 14—State of the State Address
 Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception
 Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown



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